Schism and Supression: The Elimination of Medical Protest Schools, 1846-1939

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The organization of the American Medical Association in 1846 signaled the beginning of a century-long structural effort by orthodox medicine to eliminate any competing or alternate schools of healing in the United States. The founding of the AMA was a response to the introduction of homeopathy, and much of its energy in the 19th Century was directed toward opposition to homeopaths, eclectics, Thomosanians and other unorthodox dissenters. With the start of the new manipulative protest schools in the 1890's, this opposition was channeled against osteopathy and chiropractic after the turn of the century. The last homeopathic medical school closed in 1924 and the final eclectic class was graduated in 1939. This study examines the difference between the 19th century assault against the early protest schools and the 20th century campaign against osteopaths and chiropractors.

Toward the end of the first half of the nineteenth century the lack of concern of the American people over the problems of the medical profession was shared by a considerable number of practitioners themselves. This was an age of geographical rivalries and manifest destiny. The slavery question was a bitter issue that was eventually to lead to a civil war. And although most persons supported the war with Mexico which resulted in the annexation of Texas, it was hard to get much agreement on anything else. Divisive issues, sectional factions, and regional pride predominated the times. The concerns of the few physicians that had assembled in the city of New York in 1846 to form the American Medical Association were, to say the least, far removed from those of the American public.

Almost forty years before the first meeting of the AMA, a significant movement within the medical profession started which indirectly would lead to the need for the founding of the association. On March 22, 1807, a medical school to be operated by the Medical Society of the County of New York was chartered. Later the same year, on December 18, the College of Medicine in Maryland was incorporated under the direct control of the state medical society of Maryland. Having previously obtained control of examination, licensure and certification of doctors through state legislative reforms, the medical societies had now begun their next move. New "society affiliated" institutions, called "proprietary" medical colleges, opened up everywhere.

Previously, schools of medicine had been established as separate departments of existing colleges and universities. This relationship tended to raise the standard of the medical degree conferred upon graduation. The new "proprietary" medical schools offered an education without the two standard features of the university affiliated medical schools — a long general education as a prerequisite and a long lecture term. This new route of obtaining a medical education without any other college requirements attracted many students. At the time an increase in the number of doctors was urgent; however, the products of these schools proved no answer. Their education was depicted as highly inadequate by many established physicians.

A few doctors, feeling that something should be done to stop the new schools, attempted in 1835 and 1839 to organize a meeting of representatives of the profession and the medical schools to create a national organization. These efforts failed and the situation grew worse.

Finally, in 1845 Dr. Nathan Smith Davis of Broome County, N.Y. and Dr. Alexander Thompson of Cayuga County, N.Y. demanded the Medical Society of the State of New York hold a national convention to correct the abuses in medical education. Among the changes in education they sought were a longer annual course of instruction (six months instead of four), sequence and grading in the curriculum, separation of the licensing power from the teaching functions and a fair standard of preliminary education.[1]

After much debate and delay, the society passed a resolution introduced by Dr. Davis on February 6, 1846, that earnestly recommended that "delegates from medical societies and colleges in the whole union . . .

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convene in the city of New York, on the first Tuesday in May, in the year 1846, for the purpose of taking concerted action."[2] One hundred delegates representing sixteen states met. Dr. Davis's call had been answered and the beginning of a new era in American health care began. For his part, Dr. Nathan Davis became known as the "father" of the AMA.

The program presented to the convention proposed the creation of a national medical association, the adoption of uniform higher requirements for an M.D. degree by all medical schools, suitable preliminary education for prospective medical students and a standard code of ethics to be maintained by the medical profession throughout the United States.[3]

The following year, on May 5, 1847, the convention reassembled in Philadelphia. Approximately 239 delegates representing over forty medical societies and twenty-eight medical colleges in twenty-two states and the District of Columbia attended. The first order of business of the convention was to resolve into the first session of the American Medical Association. The convention also decided that premedical training should include a liberal education in the arts and sciences; that medical college entrance require a certificate of completion of training from the students' preceptors and that the M.D. degree should require three years of study, including two lecture sessions of six months each, a dissection section of three months, and one session of hospital experience.

A committee on the licensing of physicians declared schools be not allowed to act as both a teaching agency and a licensing authority. To offset this problem the committee proposed that examining and licensing boards be established on a state-wide basis. The matter was referred to the Committee on Medical Education for report at the Association's next meeting.

At this first official meeting the AMA also outlined and adopted a constitution. The constitution declared the purpose of the association to be:

> . . . For cultivating and advancing medical knowledge, for elevating the standards of medical education for promoting the usefulness, honor, and interests of the medical profession. for enlightening and directing public's opinion in regard to the duties, responsibilities, and requirements of medical men, for exciting and encouraging emulation and concert of action in the profession, and facilitating and fostering friendly intercourse between those engaged in it.[4]

While the 1847 meeting firmly established the American Medical Association, progress was slow. There was no legal authority by which its recommendations, resolutions and proposed reforms could be enforced, and the "proprietary" schools were resistant.[5]

Many other factors interfered with the AMA's efforts to improve the standards of medical education as the organization moved into the second half of the nineteenth century. "Sectarian" medical schools that had spread throughout the country strongly resented the efforts of the AMA. They immediately became the primary concern of the new association.

The AMA referred to all nonconformist healers as sectarian. Its Judicial Council had defined this term to include any practitioner who "follows a dogma, tenet or principle based on the authority of its promulgation to the exclusion of demonstration and practice." The very founding of the AMA was, in fact, more of a response to the sectarian medical groups and schools than any of the other society controlled proprietary schools.

The healing world had very much come to embrace the non-conventional practitioners. Homeopathy, eclecticism, Thomsonianism, naturopathy and later in the century, osteopathy, electric-therapeutic health care, magnetic healing and chiropractic all acquired strong followings. They became recognized as a different type of specialist, one whose activity was limited not by an area of performance but by method of treatment. To a degree their success indicated a movement by the American public away from unpleasant and dangerous remedies of the conventional doctor of that time.

Health care during this period was marking time on the threshold of modern medicine. The practitioners of medicine were also marking time. Research involving human beings was very unpopular, yet common. Quite often patients in need of help became the objects of this research. While doctors investigated, they most often could only recommend that nothing be done and relied on old methods of treatment. Hence, purging and bleedings were still very common in the 1840's and 50's. The non-conventional practitioners quite often offered a new relief to discomforting medical treatment. They also offered new promise of healing and the return to full health. Homeopaths and Thomsonians specifically "became the modern medical sects."[6]

As the AMA began its crusade to supress the medical protest schools, it was against homeopathy that it launched its most vigorous attack.

Homeopathy was founded by Samuel Christian Hahnemann (1755-1853). Hahnemann was born in Meissan, Germany. He became a medical student at the University of Leipzig and received his degree at Erlangen in 1779. In the 1790's Hahnemann began a series of experiments, some made on his own person, which led to the formation of his system of homeopathy (from the Greek — *homoios*, meaning "like" and *pathos*, "disease").

Homeopathy was based on the use of small quantities of natural substances that in large doses produced effects

similar to those of the symptoms being treated. This contrasted with allopathy, the dominant medical opinion, which provided therapy with remedies that produced effects different from the symptoms.[7] Homeopathy was once America's leading alternative medical system.[8] In 1844 the American Institute of Homeopathy was founded. It was America's first medical organization.[9] The AMA, in fact, was partially founded in 1846 as a direct response to homeopathy more than any of the other sectarian movements. The AMA became determined to eliminate this most bitter enemy.

But the first fifty years of opposition to homeopathy by the AMA was of minimal effect. Homeopathy had fallen on fertile ground. Conditions in American allopathic medical practice were too chaotic. Therapeutic standards were low. Within the next three decades homeopathy spread across the United States. As established medical practitioners attempted to block the homeopaths from their institutions, the latter went ahead and established their own.

The Homeopathic Medical College of Philadelphia was chartered in 1848. In 1869 it became the Hahnemann Medical College. In 1860 the Homeopathic Medical College of New York and the Hahnemann Medical College of Chicago were chartered. The Homeopathic Hospital of Philadelphia opened in 1874. The growth of homeopathy is even better illustrated, despite the AMA's opposition, by the number of new homeopathic associations that were organized. The Southern Homeopathic Association began in 1865, the International Hahnemann Association in 1880, and the Missouri Valley Homeopathic Medical Association around the end of the century.[10] By 1902 there were twenty-two homeopathic schools in the United States with 1,833 students enrolled, a clear indicator that homeopathy had survived the AMA's initial attacks throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

The eclectic movement, another AMA sectarian dissenter, also survived the initial onslaught of the AMA. The eclectic movement emphasized a variety of botanical preparations for the cure of illness. It stood out as a revolt against the alleged overuse of mercury, antimony, harsh purgatives, and a few other remedies.[11] Samuel Thomson (1769-1843), who originated the eclectic system of treatment, was a native of New Hampshire and was entirely self-taught in medicine. He concluded that all disease is the effect of one general cause and may be removed by one general remedy. The general cause was "cold or lessening of the power of heat;" the remedy, to "increase the internal heat, remove all obstructions of the system, restore the digestive powers of the stomach, and produce a natural perspiration.[12] Thomson used only two types of treatment aids: the botanicals, to which he became attached to early in his career, and external steaming, a procedure he used to save the life of his daughter.

While the eclectic movement originated with Thomson, a large part of the profession moved beyond his control. Thomson was dictatorial. He was very jealous of his claim to the rights as founder of the system. Because of his own lack of formal education he was also very distrustful of educated men and their systems of education, especially the allopaths of the AMA. In 1838 the Friendly Botanic Societies split into two groups. Thomson continued to lead the United States Thomsonian Society while Alva Curtis (1797-1881) began the Independent Thomsonian Botanic Society, a group that included Thomson's sons among its members.

This schism eliminated what might be called pure Thomsonianism. Curtis's independent group quickly joined the Reformed System, later the eclectic school, originated by Wooster Beach (1794-1859). In 1848 the American Eclectic Medical Association was founded by Beach and Curtis and again revived in 1870 after thirteen years of inactivity.

The eclectic movement was consistently unpredictable and often merely filled gaps for the benefit of the public. While the AMA opposed the eclectics and Thomsonians on the same grounds it did the homeopaths, the second half of the nineteenth century saw little direct effect on suppression of the movement by the trade association. The movement's growth or lack of it came from within. By 1900 there were seven eclectic schools in America with a total student enrollment of 582.

While other sectarian movements such as naturopathy, physiomedicine and heliopathy existed during the late 1800's, their quick departure reflected more of their lack of support than organized opposition by the AMA.

The American Medical Association consistently opposed all sectarian groups. And while it was virtually powerless to eliminate them, it did begin early to rid its own ranks of nonconforming members. At the Philadelphia meeting of the AMA in 1855, it condemned the mingling of homeopathy with standard medical practice and announced that schools mixing the teaching of homeopathy with "scientific" medicine should not be supported by the profession.[13] The AMA exerted intense pressure against any medical society that tolerated sectarian practitioners. In Washington, D.C. at a session of the AMA in 1870, it called upon the Massachusetts Medical Society to expel from its membership all eclectics and homeopaths. Since the Massachusetts Society complied, the sincerity of the Association's threat was not tested until 1882, when the Judicial Council, created in 1873 to consider ethical and judicial questions, voted against representatives of delegates from the New York State Medical Society because of its connection with homeopathic groups.[14]

For the most part the AMA was still highly unsuccessful in its efforts to deal with the problems involving the relationships of practitioners of traditional and sectarian medicine. It was not until the AMA renewed its opposition to the manipulative protest schools of osteopathy and chiropractic that the older sectarian schools would finally feel the power of the AMA.

The new effectiveness of the AMA in promoting political reforms at the beginning of the new century depended upon the corrections of its own organization's inadequacies. Although the AMA had little influence upon the political and legislative changes of the nineteenth century, it had gained valuable experience. New techniques of political strategy had come to realization out of the frustrations the association had experienced by its ineffectiveness. Affected by a spirit of reform that had begun to stir restlessly on the American scene and that had already revolutionized medical education in the leading nations of western Europe, the AMA prepared for a more influential role in public affairs by first dealing with its own most pressing problems.[15] At its June session, 1900, it authorized the creation of the Committee on Organization. Inspired by the British Medical Association's successful attempt at reorganization, the AMA was able to discard its old organization, revise its constitution and introduce many structural reforms.

All of these changes injected a new spirit of life into the AMA that reflected in its strategy toward the sectarian movements. After its successful food and drug battle of 1906 the AMA emerged determined to wage a relentless campaign against medical quackery.

Two new rival healing groups — osteopathy and chiropractic — had developed in the last half of the nineteenth century that now were becoming particularly annoying to the AMA. Both schools subscribed to a new concept in health care — that of manipulation. Their success and boasts of such success infuriated the AMA to new heights of sectarian opposition.

"Osteopathy", said the founder of the discipline, Andrew Taylor Still (1828-1917), on its eighteenth birthday, "deals with the body as a perfect machine, which if kept in proper adjustment, nourished, and cared for, will run smooth into ripe and old age.[16] Andrew Still believed that disease was caused by an abnormality in the nerve divisions, with a resultant suspension, either temporary or permanent, of the blood either in the arteries or veins. In 1874 Still, a frontiersman, claiming title to a lost diploma from a southern medical school allegedly destroyed in the Civil War, instituted the practice of osteopathy in Macon, Missouri. Later he moved to Kirksville, Missouri in 1892 where he established the American School of Osteopathy. By 1900 there were a dozen osteopathic schools spread across the nation along with a new nationwide association — the American Association for the Advancement of Osteopathy, now the American Osteopathic Association.

The discoverer of chiropractic, Daniel David Palmer, was himself held out in his local community by his medical competitors in health service as a fake, a fraud, and a quack.[17] Since Palmer's discovery was first introduced to the world in September, 1895, chiropractic has been condemned and distorted by the medical profession as a fraud perpetrated upon the public. Its leading opponent, the AMA, waged its largest campaign against chiropractic.

The principle of chiropractic is based upon the theory that misalignment of vertebrae cause pressure on spinal nerves and prevent the nerves from performing their normal function. This impingement of the nerves affects the flow of energy to all parts of the body. The chiropractor, having located the spinal nerve impingement, removes it by an adjustic process of placing the vertebra in normal opposition with the other segments of the spine. When the nerve interference is removed the body resumes normal function with all of its parts coordinated so that health may result.

Despite constant ridicule by the educated classes of society and intense opposition by other health professions, chiropractic still managed to spread rapidly over the United States and Canada. By 1910 there were estimated to be 5,000 to 6,000 chiropractors in America.[18]

Being unsuccessful in their attempt to destroy osteopathy and chiropractic by ridicule and claims of fraudulent practice the medical societies started a campaign to force the legal authorities to enforce the practice acts and impose the penal clauses. To resist this move, the sectarian schools fought hard to have their own practice acts passed in order to exempt them from the penal clauses of the medical practice acts. By 1910 the osteopaths had been successful in having had acts passed licensing them in the practice of osteopathy. Illinois had an "Other Practitioners" Act under which all practitioners of a system of healing not associated with medicine could be licensed upon passing an examination. A few years later chiropractors in the state of Kansas were successful in getting their own chiropractic law passed.

While the manipulative protest schools were able to withstand the AMA's onslaught, the older sectarian movements were not so lucky.

In November 1908 the trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, authorized a study designed to "ascertain the fact concerning medical education and the medical schools themselves at the present time."[19] The assignment was given to Abraham Flexner (1866-1959), a noted surveyor in the field of education. Flexner was considered an authority on medical education. He contended that

homeopaths, eclectics, physiomedics, and osteopaths might rightly be considered sectarian rather than fraudulent practitioners since they all believe that "anatomy, pathology, bacteriology and physiology" must for the foundation of medical education. He regarded chiropractors and mechanotherapists as no more than "unconscionable quacks."[20]

The Flexner Report threw a brilliant light on the appalling conditions in many of the medical schools. The report described medicine in the 1800's as a century of overproduction of cheap doctors. Only 22 of 155 medical schools required more than a high school education. But the report offered more than criticism, it made numerous suggestions. The report also had not only a large influence upon professional people, but especially a large influence on universities and upon public opinion. The fearless exposure of deficiencies in medical education appearing in 1910 in the Flexner Report also rested in some measure on the contributions of the AMA.[21] In 1904 the AMA had created a Council on Medical Education for the purpose of analyzing the country's 159 medical school programs and making recommendations for their improvements. Near the end of their study, the AMA decided that the report would carry more weight if it were done by an unrelated third party. So, in 1908, an agreement with the Carnegie Foundation was completed and the report was authored under the name of Abraham Flexner.[22]

Flexner's solution to the problem was to "reduce the number and increase the output of medical schools." Ideally, he wrote, "a medical school is a university department; it is most favorably located in a large city, where the problem of producing clinical material, at once abundant and various", practically solves itself. Most of all, Flexner's Report sought high uniform standards for all schools of medicine.

In 1910, when the report was released, the study produced a massive response. One result of the report was the granting of power to the AMA to accredit U.S. medical schools.[23] The AMA exercises this right through its heavy domination of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education. Upon the granting of the power to accredit medical schools, medical education improved immensely. But the main result of the report was the effect that it had on older sectarian schools that philosophically could not comply with the demands for changes. Between 1908 and 1920 seventy-six institutions were closed. The demise of these institutions gave the Council on Medical Education no cause for regret and inspired its fight for even higher standards.

The AMA's consistent attacks on the bastians of sectarian medical practice had finally been successful, and while schools of osteopathy and chiropractic survived along with numerous non-descript medical organizations, other irregular schools of practice had all but disappeared.

The last homeopathic medical school closed in 1924 and by 1945 only five states had homeopathic examing boards; and these boards examined only three candidates. The final eclectic class graduated in 1939 and by 1945 the only eclectic board in Arkansas remained totally inactive. Fourteen states tested osteopaths with examinations offered by standard medical boards, while 17 states required to pass basic science tests.

The schools of medical thought taught by the proponents of homeopathy, eclectism and others, had much to recommend yet one by one they were exterminated or absorbed by allopathic medicine.[24] And while osteopathy had appeared to survive, for all intents and purposes, it was also consumed by allopathic medicine and left only with its name. Only D.D. Palmer's chiropractic can claim in history to be the true survivor of the AMA's suppression of the medical protest schools of the nineteenth century.

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[20]Burrow, *AMA: Voice*, p. 3

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[22]Marks, *Story Med. Amer.*, p. 205

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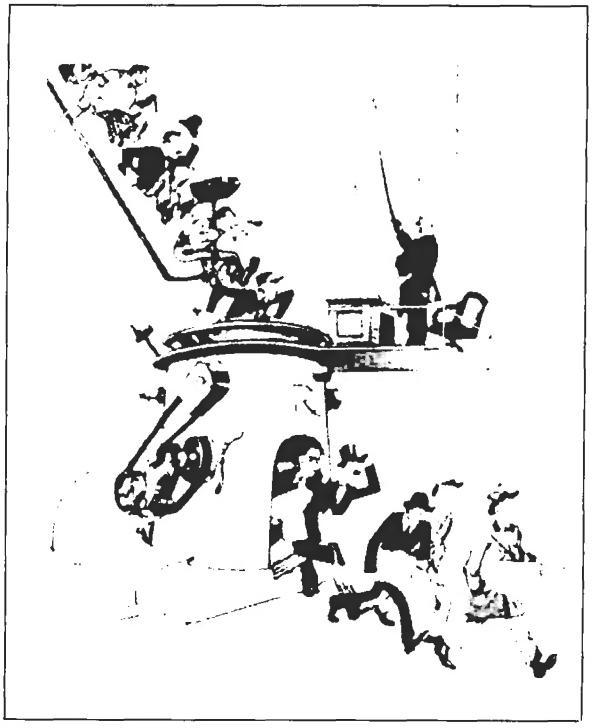
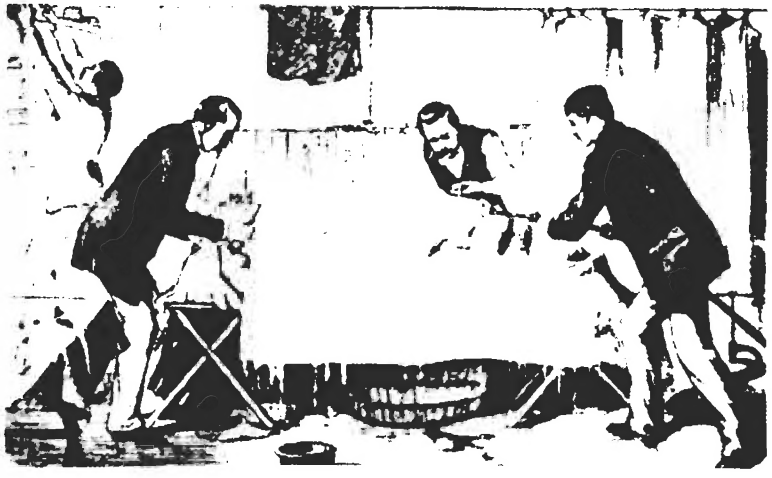
[24]Dye, *Evol. Chiro.*, p. 109

Medical dissenters in the late 19th century included Andrew Taylor Still (1826-1916). Like his contemporary, D.D. Palmer, he was born in a log cabin, was an eccentric with metaphysical underpinnings to his philosophy and had followers who would engage in bitter controversy over the dimensions of his new school of healing. Unlike homeopathic and eclectic medicine, his osteopathy survived as an alternative school. Unlike chiropractic, it did not remain separate and distinct from general medical practice.



"Regular" doctors try water treatment



"Heroic medicine" was the catch-all for the 19th century and early 20th century medical practice, in which discredited practices such as phlebotomy (bloodletting) and "hydropathy" were in vogue by the "regulars." By 1910 medical education was a scandal, with popular publications poking fun at the "diploma mills" (above). The first chiropractic schools were at least competitive with many which were to produce much of the medical population for the first half of this century.